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THE RULE OF WORSHIP

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THE PRECEPTS OR RULES OF THE CHURCH

1. To be present at Mass on all Sundays and the chief Holydays, and to keep Sunday as a day of worship, rest, and recreation.
2. To receive Holy Communion at least three times a year, of which Eastertide shall be one.
3. To go to confession at least once a year.
4. To fast in Lent, and to eat no meat on Fridays.
5. To uphold the Church's marriage law.
6. To give regularly to the support of the Church and the Ministry.

The Rule of Worship

THE first Rule or Precept of the Church is to be present at Mass on all Sundays and the chief Holydays, and to keep Sunday as a day of worship, rest, and recreation.

Before proceeding to consider this rule in detail, two points arising out of the form in which it is presented require a brief introductory explanation.

1. *The use of the word 'Mass.'*—In the New Testament, the names for the one service instituted by our Lord are 'the Breaking of Bread' and 'the Lord's Supper.' In the Book of Common Prayer it is called 'The Administration of the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion'; while its title in the first Reformed English Prayer Book was 'The Supper of the Lord or the Holy Communion, commonly called the Mass.' It is generally supposed by non-Catholics that the Mass is a comparatively

modern and utterly unscriptural substitute for the Lord's Supper, and that it was deliberately repudiated by the Church of England at the Reformation. We claim that the Church of England did nothing of the kind, and that, as the first Reformed Prayer Book indicates, the Lord's Supper and the Mass are only two different names for one and the same thing. Indeed, were there space, it would be most easy to show in detail that the Eucharistic Liturgy in the Prayer Book is substantially identical with the Mass of pre-Reformation times, and that both one and the other are a legitimate and natural development of the Lord's own service as originally instituted by him, with all its essentials unaltered.

Why, then, it may be asked, do we make such a point of the word Mass in view of all the criticism and prejudice which it arouses? We have some very friendly critics who take us seriously to task for our use of the word. It is obscure in its derivation, they tell us; it has no particular doctrinal meaning; it causes needless irritation and offence. If the Mass is the Lord's Supper, why not call it the Lord's Supper, and get rid of at least one cause of strife and discord? After all, what does the

name matter? 'A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.'

The answer to this objection is twofold. In the first place we use the word Mass because of its great practical convenience. It is essential for us to have some short simple word to describe the service as a whole, and 'Mass' is peculiarly suitable for this purpose just because it has no particular meaning. Holy Communion describes one particular aspect of the service, and is therefore liable to misunderstanding, since we are often present at the service without communicating. Of other titles given to the rite, the Lord's own Service, and the Administration of the Lord's Supper, are too cumbrous for common use, while Eucharist is a foreign word which has never become popular in England.

The second reason why we use the word Mass is much more important. Though it is true that it has no doctrinal significance in itself, it has come to be inevitably associated with the traditional Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist. It has been the ordinary name for the Lord's own service in Western Christendom for at least 1,500 years, and it is used today by those Christians who believe in the Real

Presence and the Eucharistic Sacrifice, and rejected by those who do not. It is the assertion that the Church of England repudiated the Mass at the Reformation which compels us to use the word, in order that we may make clear to all men our belief that the Church of England did nothing of the kind. We could not give up the word without seeming tacitly to admit that the English Communion Service is not the Mass, but something entirely different from it.

2. *What are the chief Holydays?*—We are in a difficulty here, because the Prayer Book does not give us clear and satisfactory guidance. In the table of all the feasts to be observed throughout the year there are twenty-seven, in addition to Sundays, and this is clearly an impracticable number to be made of obligation for ordinary folk. The table of weekday Feasts to be preceded by a Vigil numbers fourteen, again more than can be legitimately demanded of everyone; for it must be remembered that the Precepts represent not a rule of devotion, but a minimum of obligation, the least possible standard of effective church-membership. On the other hand, if we take the weekday Feasts for which a Proper Preface

is provided, we have only two—Christmas Day and Ascension Day—while two others which have been universally observed in this way—Corpus Christi and the Feast of the Assumption—are not mentioned in the Prayer Book Calendar at all, though there has been a widespread revival of their observance among us. While it is not possible to regard as obligatory for members of the English Church the observance of Feasts which are not in the Prayer Book Calendar, the simplest plan would seem to be to follow the general Western rule which at the present time directs the observance of eight Feasts as of obligation. Of these, five are Feasts of our Lord, one of our Lady, one of the Apostles, and one of all the saints together. The Feasts of our Lord are, first, the three great festivals with which we celebrate his nativity—Christmas Day, the Circumcision, and the Epiphany; and, secondly, the two festivals of his risen and glorified life—Ascension Day and Corpus Christi. The one festival of our Lady which is observed as a Holyday of Obligation is the Assumption on August 15; that of the Apostles, the Feast of SS. Peter and Paul, on June 29; and that of all the saints, All Saints' Day, on November 1.

§

Attendance at Mass on Sunday has been the universal custom of Christian people from the very beginning. Thus we read in Acts xx. 7: 'Upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them.' The Mass was the only service in the early Church, and if anyone absented himself for a certain number of Sundays without good cause, he was regarded as having cut himself off from the fellowship of the Church.

Our first duty on Sunday, then, is to observe the precept by hearing Mass. We are not bound to receive Holy Communion every Sunday, though it is most desirable that we should do so, but we are bound to hear Mass. This is a primary obligation of church membership. It is not a question of feelings or inclinations or preferences, but of duty.

It is easy to understand why the Church makes attendance at Mass on the Sundays and chief Holydays an obligation for all her members. Instituted by our Lord himself as the perpetual memorial of his Passion and Death,

and enshrining his objective Presence under the veils of bread and wine, it sets forth in a great dramatic action the Mysteries of the Incarnation and the Atonement. On the Altar as on the Cross, Christ presents to the Father, for us and with us, one and the same oblation of perfect obedience which is ultimately the only worship which man can acceptably offer to God. The Mass is thus the characteristic common action of the Christian Society, uniting us to our Lord and to one another, as we join with Angels and Archangels and the whole Company of Heaven in a supreme act of worship. Even if it be regarded from a human standpoint, and judged apart from its supernatural resources, the Mass is without a serious rival in its power at once to satisfy and to exalt the religious instincts of mankind. In a thousand subtle and imperceptible ways it associates us with the accumulated religious experience of past generations, and enables us to share in 'the long result of time.' Add to this that in its dramatic action and ceremonial accompaniments it offers an incomparable expression of art dedicated to the noblest purpose. To quote Mr. R. A. Cram in *The Gothic Quest*: 'The established ceremonies of

High Mass take their place among the few supreme triumphs of art in all time; in a way, the great artistic composition takes precedence of all in point of sheer beauty and poignant significance. In the ceremonial of the Mass, art comes full tide.'

§

Merely to be present at Mass without making any effort to lift up our heart and mind to God, though it would fulfil the letter of the first precept, would be completely out of harmony with its spirit.

In order to hear Mass devoutly, two things are necessary. The first is a good intention. We go to Mass not only to join in a form of public prayer, but to assist in a great action, the greatest action that can be performed on earth. The Church expects everyone who is present to unite with the priest in offering a Sacrifice to God, and not only with the priest whom we can see, but with the Lord Jesus Christ, who is himself both Priest and Victim. The true Altar is in Heaven, of which our earthly altars are but types and shadows, and in the Mass we ascend thither with our great

High Priest who offers to the Father, on behalf of redeemed humanity, the oblation of perfect obedience which is ultimately the only worship which man can acceptably offer to God. As a help to hearing Mass devoutly nothing is more useful than the habit of forming a distinct intention before the service begins, in some such words as these: 'I am about to assist at Mass to join in offering the great Sacrifice to Almighty God; to associate myself with the Passion of Christ; to thank God for all his mercies; to ask pardon for my sins; to obtain blessings for the whole Church, for my friends and neighbours and for myself; and for this or that particular intention.'

The other necessary condition for hearing Mass devoutly is attention. To give way wilfully to distractions and wandering thoughts is to be absent in spirit though present in body. One of the commonest causes of distraction is unpunctuality. There are some people who always contrive to be a little late for Mass, and so give themselves no opportunity for recollection before the service is well on its way. If we really desire to pay attention to what is going on, we should try to be in our place a few minutes before Mass

begins, in order to have time to collect our thoughts and make our intention.

Again, if we would avoid distraction we must pay attention to our outward behaviour. Looking about, fidgeting, sitting or kneeling in a lounging and irreverent way, all have their effect on our mental and spiritual attitude, and are, moreover, a cause of distraction to other worshippers.

There are many different methods of assisting at Mass, and we are free to choose that which best assists our devotion. So long as we are joining in the Holy Sacrifice and attending to the great action that is being performed, it does not matter what form of words we use. We may, if we like, follow the words which the priest is saying at the altar; or we may use the devotions for Mass which are found in most prayer-manuals, and which are as a rule simpler in their language than the prayers in the Liturgy, and better suited for many people; or, again, we may hear Mass devoutly by making a meditation in the course of it.

To sum up what has been said on this point: To assist at Mass on all Sundays and the greater Holydays is the first duty of a Catholic, and one of his greatest privileges. To hear

Mass well we must be punctual, and not slight the Holy Sacrifice by coming so late as to be unable to attend to it properly; we must have the intention of joining in the great ends with which the Sacrifice is offered, and we must do our best to withdraw our thoughts from worldly affairs, and to lift up our hearts and minds to God, with as little distraction as possible.

§

Let us now pass on to consider the second part of the first precept. We are to keep Sunday as a day of worship, rest, and recreation.

First, we are to keep Sunday as a day of worship. If we have any real devotion to our Lord, we shall naturally try to carry through the whole of Sunday a spirit of recollection. It does not say much for our keenness about our religion if, when we have fulfilled our bare duty by hearing Mass, we spend the rest of the day amusing ourselves without another thought of God. A church full at Mass, and half-empty at Evensong, is a happier and more welcome sight than a church full at Evensong and half-empty at Mass. But the ideal is a

church full at Mass and full at Evensong too. It is true that there is no obligation to attend other services in addition to Mass, but there is an obligation to observe Sunday as a day of worship; and if after hearing Mass we so crowd the rest of the day with secular occupations or amusements as to allow no opportunity for recollection and devotion, we are certainly not observing Sunday according to the mind of the Church.

One excellent way of maintaining the true spirit of the day is to devote some time each Sunday to spiritual reading. The solemn ceremonies which attend the singing of the Gospel at High Mass are a reminder to us of the great importance which the Church attaches to the devout study of Holy Scripture. The regular reading of the Gospels, and of other devotional books which set our Lord's doctrine and example before us, is a most valuable aid to the recollection of God's presence, and helps to keep up the store of good thoughts and feelings within us, without which we cannot hope to persevere in prayer. Spiritual reading is important, too, not only as an aid to our devotion, but in order to afford instruction in our religion. We are surrounded by people who

are ignorant of the Catholic Faith, and proportionately bitter against it. If we are well-instructed we shall be able to explain our religion to others who misunderstand and attack it, and may thus be the means of doing a great deal of good.

Secondly, we are to keep Sunday as a day of rest. This means that we are not to engage in the ordinary work by which we earn our living. It is obvious that this rule cannot be strictly observed in all cases. In a highly complex civilization such as our own, in which we are all dependent to a great degree on one another, a good deal of work must go on on Sundays for the service of the community. Moreover, there are other occupations which are not essential to the welfare of society in which a man may be compelled to work whether he wants to or not, or else lose his situation. In all such cases the Church permits Sunday work on the ground of necessity. But the majority of us are not so situated, and the Church insists that we should rest from our ordinary work on Sunday, apart from real and grave necessity, because she knows that a weekly day of rest is necessary both for body and soul, and that without it we have very

little chance of fulfilling the duty of worship. The order in which the Sunday duties are enumerated in the first precept is the historical order. First, worship; then, rest and recreation. From the beginning, as we have seen, Christians were bound to be present at Mass on Sundays, but it was naturally impossible for them to keep the Sunday rest while Christianity was a persecuted and proscribed religion. When the persecutions ceased, and the Roman Empire became Christian, the Emperor Constantine immediately set aside Sunday by law, as a day of abstinence from ordinary work.

Lastly, we are to keep Sunday as a day of recreation. The word 'recreation' is here used not merely in its popular and limited sense as a synonym for amusement, but in the true and proper meaning of re-creation as signifying renewal of life. In this sense, worship as the nurture of the soul is the principal part of recreation. But man needs not only spiritual refreshment, he needs mental and physical relaxation as well, and these entail exercise and amusement. Any amusement which is right on a weekday is right on a Sunday, provided first that it does not lead to a marked increase of Sunday work, and so

interfere with the observance of the day by others; and, secondly, that it does not so absorb time and attention as to interfere with the spirit of worship and recollection that are proper to the day. The reluctance to recognize this, and frankly to admit it, is a grave hindrance to us in dealing with the problem of the decline of church attendance. If Sunday is a day for physical as well as for spiritual recreation, we ought to have the courage and the common sense so to rearrange the times of our services as to give the faithful reasonable opportunities for both. Eleven o'clock is not the divinely appointed hour for the popular act of Sunday worship, and in the face of a revolutionary change in social habits it is more than foolish to cling to it. The Catholic Religion is not intended to be the monopoly of well-to-do folk, who can pay domestic servants to wash up after their breakfast, to make their beds, and to cook their dinner. It is meant to be, and it ought to be, the Faith of the masses of the people who are not in a position to employ other people to do their housework, who have a right to a hot dinner on the only day on which they can all sit down together, and who, after a hard day's

work in shop or office or factory, ought to be encouraged to enjoy the country outings and other Sunday recreations which are rapidly becoming an accepted part of the general Sunday life of the people. It is the considered opinion of the writer that if the Anglo-Catholic churches as a whole, or indeed any considerable part of them, would unite in putting the chief Mass of Sunday at an earlier hour, they would be carrying out an urgent and long overdue reform. Such a rearrangement would in no way interfere with the habits of the devout who often attend an early Mass as well as a late one; it would encourage the frequency of Communion; and it would do more to restore the habit of church-going than could be achieved in any other way.

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